



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NOV.

1895.

ANNALS
OF THE
AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE.

RECENT POLITICAL EXPERIMENTS IN THE
SWISS DEMOCRACY.

The tiny Swiss Republic, thanks to specially favorable conditions, has within the last fifty years made very valuable experiments in the organization of democracy, in the putting into practice of the democratic principle which may be summed up by the word, government of the people by the people.

Doubtless, many of the institutions she has inaugurated, could not be exported, and would, perhaps, taken as they are, be ill-suited to other commonwealths; the Swiss experiments may, however, contain results useful to other nations, for nothing human is uninteresting to man.

But many think that political machinery is not of the first importance, for according to Montesquieu, the best guarantee of democratic prosperity, lies in civic virtue. The best form of government is liable to be led astray by politicians. Beware of politicians! The workman makes the tool, not the tool the workman!

One ought, however, to allow that, talents being equal, a man well equipped will turn out better work than a man supplied with inferior tools. Moreover, in the domain of politics, the tools, *viz.*, the government system, have not only a practical significance but a very important educational function. Indeed, they either enable the citizens to control efficaciously the march of public affairs, or hamper them in so doing by hindering their efforts whenever they take an initiative.

A marked change has taken place during the second half of this century in the organization of the Helvetic Democracy. The latter, at the outset, was akin in form to what is called representative government; the only notable difference was that the executive, both in the federal and in the cantonal spheres, was not at the mercy of a parliamentary majority. It was appointed either by the people or by legislative assemblies, for a term of years, and held office irrespective of party votes till the end of its tenure. Representative government has been gradually superseded by a sort of direct government in which the people themselves manage their own affairs—and this by means of their comitia. Sovereigns *de jure* they have become sovereigns *de facto*. The political centre of gravity has been displaced.

Three great steps have been accomplished in the line of direct democracy, and these three stages are the referendum, the right of initiative, and proportional representation. It is not our object here to state by a thorough analysis the precise form which the new institutions have taken and the particulars of their working. To treat this side of the question would fill pages with dry and documentary details of information which may be secured otherwise. We simply want to give a general view of the subject.

Our readers must bear in mind that Switzerland is made up of twenty-five small republics, twenty-two cantons, three of which have been subdivided into two half cantons. They form so many states, enjoying nowadays a rare degree of

autonomy having their distinct and separate history, and possessing an organization which frequently varies greatly from one to the other. Consequently to study politics in Switzerland is to travel intellectually across twenty-five democracies as different, in many respects, from each other, as were the small Greek republics. Athens and Sparta belonged to the same race and spoke the same language; but that was all, and the student of politics might have been fully acquainted with one and entirely ignorant of the other.

In Switzerland, however, there are not merely separate states to consider, since they have realized the scheme which the Greeks vainly dreamed of for their beautiful country; since although separated, they have succeeded in uniting for the sake of higher national interests. The sister republics are members of the Swiss Confederation, which also has a political life of its own.

Before dealing with the main point of the subject, a few preliminary remarks will help to explain the causes of the phenomena we are about to describe. The stream which we shall follow has deep and secret sources.

As a rule, all the improvements of any importance that take place in the Swiss Democracy originate within the bounds of the cantons. Here is the laboratory for new political and administrative schemes. It is only after having proved successful on a small scale that an experiment has a chance of being tried in the sphere of the Confederation, and the reason for this is obvious.

There are changes which are better tested in humble communities. Here, indeed, the people can bring their interests to a practical issue more readily than in larger commonwealths. In fact there is no discovery of any sort which has not in its past development a period of patient and obscure preparation. And there we find, by the by, a testimony to the excellence of decentralization as an incentive for a people to modify their political organization according to circumstances and the nature of their peculiar genius.

It must also be borne in mind that the new departures in the evolution of the Swiss Democracy have been in no way discoveries in the proper sense of the word, forms which did not exist and were brought to light and to life by dint of science, mental effort and meditation, but only and purely outgrowths of old forms of government, which have been properly adapted to the needs of modern life.

It is known that in some communities the citizens, from time immemorial, have met on an appointed day, generally now in the first weeks of the spring, mostly in May, to elect their magistrates, ratify the new laws or measures prepared by the authorities, vote the taxes and, in truth, act for a few hours as a nation managing its own affairs. Here we have what the German language has termed *landsgemeinden*, or assemblies of the people. Nobody has ever attended such mass meetings without being deeply impressed by their simple grandeur, nay, their sublimity. Let us quote a few lines from Edward A. Freeman's "The Growth of the English Constitution," to show what an Anglo-Saxon thinks of such a spectacle:

"Year by year, on certain spots among the dales and the mountainsides of Switzerland, the traveler . . . may look on a sight such as no other corner of the earth can any longer set before him. He may there gaze and feel, what none can feel but those who have seen with their own eyes, what none can feel in its fullness more than once in a lifetime, the thrill of looking for the first time face to face on freedom, in its purest and most ancient form. . . . There, year by year, on some bright morning of the spring-tide, the Sovereign People, not entrusting its rights to a few of its number, but discharging them itself in the majesty of its corporate person, meets in the open market place or in the green meadow at the mountain's foot, to frame the laws to which it yields obedience as its own work, to choose the rulers whom it can afford to greet with reverence as drawing their commission from itself. . . .

"We may see the institutions of our own forefathers, the institutions which were once common to the whole Teutonic race, institutions whose outward form has necessarily passed away from greater states, but which contain the germs out of which every free constitution in the world has grown."

Beside the *landsgemeinden*, in which the citizens of a whole canton act as lawmakers and sovereigns, a practice of a similar character, although more modest in importance and more reduced in its field of action, exists in the "communes,"—(*Gemeinden* in German, analogous to the New England towns)—of different cantons, where the citizens hold, on the same principle, conventions *in pleno* to discuss and settle their local affairs.

Now, it may be observed that on such occasions the people are at liberty to overthrow the work of their rulers, if they choose. This is the principle of the *Referendum*. They have on the other hand a right to move any kind of proposal which they hope may become a matter of legislation. This is the right of *Popular Initiative*. And, at last, all shades of opinion stand face to face in those great comitia; there is no exclusion of a political party by another party on the ground that majorities can overrule and oppress minorities. This is the starting point of *Proportional Representation*.

But what are the causes which prompted the Swiss people to come back to the old features of primitive self-government, and to adapt them to the necessities of the times?

The reason of the reappearance of the system of direct democracy is the failure on the part of the representative government to make good its promises. Between the years 1846 and 1848, the last surviving oligarchies had collapsed and had been succeeded by governments freely chosen by the people. But very soon the people came to the conclusion that they were in the hands of "rings" or "cliques," organized for the purpose of grasping the honors and the benefits attached to the possession of power. The interests of the masses were neglected, important minorities had but few members to defend their views in the political assemblies, special measures having been taken violently to suppress their influence, for gerrymandering and electoral tricks are not entirely American devices and the Swiss may

claim some part in them. The public expenses were rapidly increasing, and the taxes, too, in the same proportion. It was a very frequent thing to use the enlarged revenue, not with a view to develop the natural resources of the country but as a means to reward the political services, either of individuals or of collections of individuals, groups, special places, or districts. In short the Swiss soon perceived that their older oligarchies had often been better than the new ones, as the modern politicians were frequently men of shady reputations; indeed, the ancient patrician families, however narrow and unconscious of the necessities of the hour they may have been, were at least, as a rule, patriotic citizens, devoted to the public welfare, jealous of their good standing and not making a business of their political influence.

People, therefore, began to think of applying the methods of direct democracy to what had been thus far representative government. The principal change consisted in this, that the conventions of the people in mass meetings were replaced by consultations through the instrumentality of the ballot-box—the only practical form consistent with the conditions of communities of some magnitude in surface and population.

The referendum now exists in all parts of Switzerland, with single exception of the canton of Fribourg, where the Catholic Conservatives are all powerful. It is used also in federal matters. It presents two forms.

It may be compulsory, as is the case in the great cantons of Zurich and Berne. If so, all laws or measures of some interest which have been passed by the legislatures must come before the people who generally, however, are not called upon to express their judgment on them before there is quite a number of bills to be simultaneously acted upon. The majority of votes cast decides as to their adoption.

But the referendum may also be optional. Such is the case in many cantons and in the Swiss Confederation

considered as a nation. What is then required to start the machine is a petition signed by a certain number of citizens; in the Swiss Confederation (containing nearly 700,000 voters), 30,000; in the canton of Geneva (with about 20,000 voters), 3500; in the remaining cantons the figures are calculated to correspond with the size of their population. The request sent to the authorities asks them to submit to the people some particular bill. This having been done, the rest of the proceedings is the same as for the compulsory referendum.

It should be noted that public opinion in Switzerland is deeply divided as to the comparative advantages of the two forms of referendum. Partisans of optional plebiscites say that what they principally want is a kind of sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of the men in power. But that system imposes on the citizens a great deal of trouble and considerable expense in collecting signatures. It presents also this drawback, that it unfavorably prejudices the question at stake. Why this is so any one may readily understand. An agitation having been especially directed against a certain bill the popular mind is likely to be affected by it when the day comes for the final vote. For these reasons the drift of sympathies tends decidedly towards the compulsory referendum.

The referendum is a negative right, a sort of veto power left with the people. But a sovereign not only needs to be armed with a right of undoing things: it must also possess a positive, a creative and a constructive right as law giver, and this is exactly what the popular initiative means.

Practically the initiative is a method of allowing the individual citizens to submit to the people any kind of proposals they wish. This law-making process reminds one of what takes place with the referendum. It begins with the drawing and signing of a petition, but the names which must accompany it may be more or less numerous than for the obtaining of the referendum; there is here

no strict principle involved—in the Swiss Confederation the number of signatures has been fixed upon at 50,000; in the canton of Geneva, at 2500.

There are two manners of presenting a proposal to the people. The first thing which may be done is to ask the authorities, be it the Federal Chambers or the Cantonal Legislature, to frame a law or take any measure with a specific purpose. This demand, whatever its nature, must be complied with.

The other way is to have the petitioners themselves present the law or measure in which they are interested, under the definite form it should receive. They act with the whole of the nation in the same manner as the members of a deliberative assembly act with that body, when they come forward to move a resolution. There are good reasons to think that this second form will more and more obtain the preference. People who have any desire to see legislation modified have a greater confidence in their own wisdom in framing a bill than in the hurry of a political body to gratify, by their legislative collaboration, a purpose with which they do not always sympathize.

The referendum and the right of initiative have given rise to some objections. The former, it has been said, is essentially negative, it has canceled a great many measures enacted by the authorities, it impedes legislative work. This is an exaggeration. The rejected measures fell by the verdict of the public because there was something in them, which the people did not approve. Later on those laws are taken up again by the legislature or chamber. After they have been revised so as to form a kind of second edition, they are then adopted or ratified by the people, without difficulty.

The right of initiative, it is alleged, has thus far only resulted in federal matters—and, cantonally, it must work in much the same way—in bringing about strange results. In its first operation, two years ago, it introduced a law

against the Jewish mode of slaughtering cattle; in the second one, on the third of June, 1894, it endeavored to have the "right to employment" acknowledged by the constitution; this was rejected. Before coming to the third and last operation, let us pause a moment. Here our answer, in presence of such facts, is that the right of initiative, especially at the outset, was expected to have some awkward consequences. But where is the serious harm it may be instrumental in doing? It can incorporate in the constitution things of a queer appearance, such as the butchery ordinance of 1893,* but these apparently awkward measures happen to be in accordance with the popular wish. This is democracy. It can also deal with proposals of an impractical, dangerous, socialistic character, as the right to labor, but in an enlightened community such schemes are sure to meet with a decisive opposition, and in such circumstances the resort to the plebiscite has the effect of purging the political atmosphere of chimerical and distracting elements. This clearing the ground has been generally acknowledged to be most useful.

But let us come now to the third and last case in which, up to the present time, the right of popular initiative was resorted to. The question at issue originated among the Catholic and some Protestant Conservatives, and was soon known under the very appropriate name of the "Spoils Campaign" (*Beutezug*). The bill framed on this occasion by the initiators aimed at obtaining money from the federal treasury for the different cantons which was to be apportioned at the rate of two francs per head of population.

The chances of success for the new crusade were great at the start. The federal government had caused some

* A short explanation may here be required. In spite of an undeniable dash of antisemitism to be regretted, that regulation, now a constitutional amendment sanctioned by the citizens, must be regarded as an important step in a new direction. The Swiss people declared that public law should not neglect questions of humanity, even towards animals. If local or cantonal authorities had in that respect given satisfaction to the feeling of the people, the strange ordinance would never have been thought of.

dissatisfaction by exaggerated expenses and by somewhat undemocratic conduct toward the wishes of the people. A few days before the popular vote, there appeared in one of our periodicals a discussion of the question by M. Numa Droz, late president of the Swiss Confederation. He said that the referendum was good for the welfare of our commonwealth as a means of controlling the work of the lawmakers, but he considered the introduction of the right of initiative as the beginning of the era of demagoguery. If the "Spoils Campaign" should succeed, said he, the basis of our public law would be altered and shaken, and no other resource would remain to the friends of democracy than to call together a convention in order to frame a new Swiss constitution, doing away with such exaggerations of democracy. Never since the agitation of 1848 had Switzerland experienced such a vital crisis.

But the "Spoils Campaign" was defeated by more than two to one in the vote of the fourth of November last. The atmosphere suddenly cleared. The fears expressed by M. Droz vanished. Everyone felt that the Swiss people was ready for direct democracy. The *Temps* of Paris echoed such views and said that the Swiss democratic institutions were now proven safe. It is to be observed that the same paper had begun by asserting that they would upset our democracy.

Now we come to the third of the decisive conquests of democracy in Switzerland, *viz.*, proportional representation, the introduction of which was accompanied with greater difficulties than attended the referendum and the right of initiative. The object in view, as has already been said, was to enable the different political groups existing in the community to make their influence felt in political bodies.

According to the "majority" system now in force almost everywhere, the party forming the majority is entitled, in each electoral district, and each district as a rule elects several representatives, to the possession of all the seats to be filled at the polls. It may, it is true, not avail

itself of its right and make some concession to the minority, but this is only an accident, a pure exception. This anomaly, inherited from the times when a tyrant wielded a despotic power, has this consequence, that there are many citizens who are practically deprived of their part of sovereignty, who never succeed in electing one of their candidates anywhere, and become, in fact, a caste of modern pariahs, in spite of all the glorious professions of modern democracy summed up in the celebrated motto of the French Revolution: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!"

But injustice and oppression, even when they wear under the hypocritical mask of legality, bring forth bitter fruits. What would become of a financial corporation from which the stronger party could expel the weaker? The corporation would break up. If a state is not shattered in the same manner when the majority of its members violate the rights of the minority, it is only because there is no possibility for the dissatisfied to retire from the political compact; but nevertheless harmony is destroyed and violence must needs be felt in some way or other. Popular representation is in its essence fair representation. Any opinion which is professed by a group of men of some numerical importance has, in each electoral district, a claim to obtain its apportionment, greater or smaller, according to its strength, in the distribution of the seats.

As soon as this improvement on the old tyrannical methods has been achieved the ballot is no longer a desperate battle between antagonistic armies. It is a peaceable competition in which the different athletes obtain the reward they are entitled to. The seats in the political bodies, instead of being taken by storm, are distributed among the combatants in the *ratio* of their numerical importance, and, in that way, representative bodies may be compared to a reduced photograph of the whole nation.

As early as 1864 there was founded at Geneva, by the initiative of Professor Ernest Naville, the great and eloquent

advocate of proportional representation, the first association for the promotion of the new principle of which the noble-minded John Stuart Mill had been one of the first apostles. Sad events had made the minds of men reflect on the iniquity of the electoral system in use; the two prominent political parties, the Conservatives and the Radicals, had collided in a fratricidal riot on an election day, and blood had stained the streets of the old city. Very soon the "reformists" started sister associations in other parts of the Swiss Confederation.

Then, for about thirty years, proportional representation was most carefully studied from every side, and its modes of application appeared in a definite shape. The system was ready for use, but who would take it? A very nice and good thing, exclaimed men of a realistic turn of mind, but purely utopian, and nothing else!

Such was the situation until four years ago. At that time a revolution broke out in the canton of Ticino, that portion of Helvetian territory bordering Italy, and in which the Italian language is spoken. The government of that region had fallen into the hands of the Conservative or Catholic party, but recent elections had revealed the fact that the people by a small majority were Liberals.

Gerrymandering or, as we say, electoral geometry, had permitted the Conservatives to retain the power. After their *coup d'état* and an election in which they had obtained a very precarious plurality, the Liberals in their turn were greatly inclined to use gerrymandering in the other way.

But, by so doing they would have assumed the responsibility of a protracted and fruitless agitation. Proportional representation soon appeared to both parties as not only the surest, but the only resource left to them to pacify the canton. Thanks to the careful study it had received at the hands of the associations of reformers all over the Confederation, it was in fit shape for immediate use, and it gave satisfaction to all.

Here we must stop a moment to make a very important remark. Had not the system of proportional representation been carefully worked out by men who, believing in the correctness of the principle, were desirous of changing the basis of the electoral law, the great achievement in the cause of justice and peace we now rejoice at, in Switzerland, would not have been effected. Is not this an eloquent encouragement to every man to look for the truth and prepare its advent, no matter if the feeling of the people should even be strongly adverse or skeptical at the beginning? The reformers, a small handful of workers, met with but little encouragement at first, they were opposed by almost all the men playing some part in politics and who enjoyed the reputation of being practical. But an hour came when the stone intended to be put at the corner of the edifice of democracy was found useful and was used. In the organization of free government there is something which is left to the brain and the spirit of research. The power of thought is a living force and no department of the world can prosper where it is stagnant.

From the canton of Ticino the movement pursued its course. The new electoral system was adopted two years ago by the cantons of Neuchâtel and Geneva, and last spring by the canton of Zug. In many others its day is coming.

But what of the Federal Chambers? A movement is on foot, supported by men of varied opinions, to introduce there also the proportional principle, but we know by experience that the fortress of the Confederation does not surrender to political reforms until most of the cantons have been conquered.

I am disposed to think that my readers would be gratified at obtaining some information about the method used in applying proportional representation. This point may be explained in a few words.

The methods vary from one canton to the other, although they all come to a satisfactory result. The difference lies

mainly in the fact that they do not all leave to the voter the same amount of liberty. Hence their greater or less degree of complexity. Suppose, for instance, that it is not permitted to put on a ticket a name which already appears on another ticket, in that case the electoral operation is much simplified, but the voter is somewhat disturbed in his habit of voting for any man he likes.

We do not hesitate to say that the mode which has been adopted in the canton of Geneva answers better than any other the requisites of the system. In the preparation of that law special honor is due to M. Alphonse Frey, a member of the reform association and of the cantonal legislature where he introduced the bill which became our present electoral law. The following are some of the prominent features of the method.

Every group or party must present its list of candidates, its ticket, a few days before the opening of the polls. The tickets may contain common names, but the common candidates are compelled to declare for what ticket they desire to stand; otherwise their option is obtained by lot.

All the suffrages given to a common candidate, no matter from what source, are counted as one suffrage, not only to him but also to the ticket to which he declared himself to belong. Suffrages given to men not official candidates are considered as null and void. Incomplete tickets, *viz.*, tickets containing fewer candidates than there are seats to be filled, are permitted, and it is expected that they will become the rule. Here is, for instance, the "Liberal ticket." Suppose there are ten names to be polled for. The Liberals say: "According to our importance we may expect to obtain two seats, under the most favorable conditions, three; in order, however, to feel perfectly secure we will present four candidates—Frank, Henry, John, and William."

Now the time for counting the vote comes; how will it be done? We will take some instances and to make things simpler, will deal only with the "Liberal" vote. Let us

then read and count a few ballots, presenting the principal combinations which may occur.

First ballot. Here we have the ticket unchanged, Frank, Henry, John, and William. We shall sum up the vote as follows: Expressed suffrages, 4; unexpressed ones, 6. Value to the credit of the "Liberal ticket," *10 suffrages*.

Second ballot. One of the four names, Henry, has been struck out and not replaced. Expressed suffrages, 3; unexpressed, 7. Value to the credit of the Liberal ticket, *10 suffrages*. We may observe, that crossing off one or several names on a ticket is not forbidden, but, on the contrary, recommended as a means of placing the candidates in the order of preference.

Third ballot. Here we read, Frank, Henry, John, William, Charles. Charles is a name borrowed from another official ticket which we will call the "Patriotic ticket." The result is: Expressed suffrages, 5; unexpressed, 5. Total, 10, of which 9 to the credit of the Liberal ticket and 1 to be added to the count of the Patriotic ticket.

Fourth ballot. Frank, Henry, Abraham—three names, of which two only are regular candidates. The latter not being a candidate—we suppose, indeed, that it is not to be found on any of the official tickets—is considered as null and void, and the summing up will be: Expressed suffrages, 2; unexpressed, 7; null and void, 1. Total, 10, with the figure 9 to be placed to the credit of the Liberal ticket.

When the counting has been done separately for all the ballots, classified according to their categories, it remains to form the special count of every ticket and to apportion the seats. This does not present any difficulty.

Let us suppose that the Liberal ticket polled 9407 suffrages (expressed or unexpressed); the Patriotic ticket, 3227; the National ticket, 2081, and the Independent ticket, 6339, and that there are no other tickets in the field. The final result will be given by a simple rule of

three. But first of all we must add the four numbers, which give 21,054 suffrages.

Then comes the elementary rule of proportion: Liberal ticket, 21,054:9407 :: 10 seats:x; Patriotic ticket, 21,054:3227 :: 10 seats:x, and so forth.

The candidates to be sent up to the deliberative body by each ticket are taken on every ticket starting from him who made the highest poll and going down until the repartition is complete.

To sum up the matter, let it be understood that there are two countings, the counting of tickets and the counting of personal suffrages. The first operation gives the proportion of seats which must be attributed to each group or party, while the counting of names on each ticket assigns to each nominee his respective position within his own party or group obtained from the candidates of his political color.

When a member of the assembly dies during his tenure of office, he is succeeded by the first of the non-elected candidates on his ticket, and a by-election is thus saved. The adversaries of the reform at Geneva had boldly announced that the counting of votes would be most complicated, so that it might last till doomsday. They were entirely mistaken and they have been obliged to acknowledge their error. In reality it was sooner done than formerly under the old system. Tables of recapitulation had been prepared and work went on without the slightest hitch. The greater part of the ballots are deposited in the ballot-box without any change, which greatly helps the work.

I can hardly describe the feeling which was experienced at Geneva at the first application, some three years ago, of the new electoral law. All were amazed at the beauty of the result, and the former adversaries of the improvement were no longer disposed to wage war against it.

Instead of the two ordinary adverse tickets we had five, one of the great parties having divided into two secondary groups, the other into three, but after the election they again

fell into two great political parties. As soon, however, as politics do not form the main interest there will be a tendency more and more accentuated for these five groups to subdivide again, like living mosaics going with facility from one place to another.

The movement towards proportional representation may be considered as irrepressible now in the Swiss Confederation, and the Swiss expect that it will in the course of time, go the round of the other civilized countries. There are already almost everywhere associations actively engaged in promoting its development and at the head of those associations we find men like Sir John Lubbock in London, Professor Emile Boutmy, director of the School of Political Science at Paris. There are reviews and pamphlets carrying everywhere the doctrine; there is one in Switzerland, there is another excellent one in Belgium, and we have applauded here the appearance, two years ago, at Chicago of a valiant little periodical, the *Proportional Representative Review*. We may have hopes for the future abroad, as well as in Switzerland.

Nothing at the present time is more striking than the advance of proportional representation in Switzerland, its native place. Hardly a month passes in which some new step is not made. The latest and most decisive success has been the adoption of the system in the federal city of Berne for the election of the municipal authorities. This result has been attained by the union of the Conservatives with the Socialists against the Radicals. The town, thanks to decentralization, acted on that occasion as a political unit. In the canton of Fribourg, one of the last bulwarks of ultramontane despotism, proportional representation is optional in municipal matters, and recently some places availed themselves of that possibility. Now more than ever the introduction of the new mode into federal elections is the great aim of many. Other reforms will still be accomplished in the line of direct democracy in the small land walled in among the giant-like ridges of the Alps.

One more subject is worthy of notice, *viz.* the compulsory vote which is just beginning to be practiced in some districts of the canton of Zurich. This step is in full accordance with the principle involved in the notion of democracy, and it must be borne in mind that, in the *landsgemeinden*, attendance is compulsory. It is, indeed, the people and not a portion of the people that form the ruling sovereign. In the constitution of the canton of Neuchâtel voting is presented not as a right but as a positive duty, but there is no penalty prescribed in the law for negligence of the duty which is an anomaly. A small fine, as in Zurich, may be commended.

We can observe at the same time how expedient it would be to annex to the compulsory vote the voting by proxy, accompanied with every kind of guarantee as to the honesty of the dealing. Here again Zurich, the foremost Swiss democracy, stands as an example.

But what is most urgent is the extension in all possible directions of the popular privileges already enjoyed. They must be adopted in municipal as well as in cantonal and federal matters. This is what is now in progress. We mentioned above the introduction of proportional representation into the town of Berne; the municipal referendum was adopted in the canton of Geneva a short time since.

As for the rest we must express some regret that the experiments in the way of democracy did not begin in the circle of the commune or parish. It would have been their natural birthplace. M. Leroy-Beaulieu, the editor of the *Economiste français*, declared himself in favor of a municipal referendum; and what is "local option" in America if not the germ of a municipal referendum which might be enlarged?

On the other hand it is evident that proportional representation was the first step to take, since it is the central point of reforms, and a point of such importance that, after it has been gained, the other popular rights become less

necessary. But what would be the logical march of things is not always the historical process. Things develop usually much more according to practical necessities than according to a rational plan.

Nothing is more frequent now for us than to see foreigners come to inquire about the results of the changes in our democratic machinery. As a rule the people are satisfied, except impenitent politicians who regret the days of yore, when they were "making fair and foul weather," to use a picturesque French idiom; but such is the present tide against them that they feel bound to hide their wrath.

The conversation, however, generally goes further. What can we do, ask the students in sociology, to try among us the recent democratic experiments which did so much to make self-government a fact in Switzerland and purify the political atmosphere? Here is our opinion on the subject.

The rational program would be the application of direct democracy to municipalities, to begin with, and in that domain the introduction first of proportional representation, —the great reform—then, if the want of them be felt, the referendum and the initiative would follow.

But more than anything else, act according to circumstances. Whenever something needs a thorough change make the change with this great principle in view, to increase the powers of the people.

We are aware that this proposal will frighten many a liberal-minded man. But we ask: Are not the people the sovereign, since they select the different governments? The question at issue is to know whether they are better fitted to decide upon men than upon things. Here the answer resulting from the experiment made in Switzerland is clear. The very citizens who often choose bad men to act in their stead do show remarkably good judgment when they deal with concrete politics. In such cases they evince a rare degree of independence, and obey much more the impulse of their common interest than political passions or

prejudices. Be assured, the remedy for the evils of democracy is to be found in an extension of the democratic principle. The results in that respect have been a very great surprise in Switzerland to men of moderate opinions.

Thanks to circumstances, more than to their political genius, the inhabitants of William Tell's country have now got the upper hand of the politicians. On the ninth of June last, in the legislature of the canton of Geneva, one of the men warped by party spirit who most fiercely opposed the greater part of the views expressed in this paper, said: "Were it not for proportional representation, of which I am an adversary, I would say that referendum, popular initiative and proportional representation are the best methods of controlling local affairs." We would add of controlling the government, either municipal, provincial or national.

It is a pity, it will be said, that these institutions are not as well fitted for large as for small communities. It may be true, but should those tools be somewhat cumbersome it would not be idle work to try them and to see how they could be adapted to the needs of every nation. They are indeed up to the present day, the only actual check on the "politician." Better, a thousand times, embarrassing contrivances than polluted governments, where honest citizens have no means of resistance nor of changing the course of things.

LOUIS WUARIN.

University of Geneva, May, 1895.